



This PDF was generated automatically from the web page located at this address:  
[https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/eu-drug-markets/methamphetamine\\_en](https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/eu-drug-markets/methamphetamine_en).  
Some errors may have occurred during this process. For the authoritative and most recent version, we recommend consulting the web page.

---

# EU Drug Market: Methamphetamine



‘EU Drug Market: Methamphetamine’ describes the European methamphetamine market from production and trafficking, to distribution and use. It details the processes, materials and players involved at different stages and levels of the market. The module takes a threat assessment approach, identifying the key issues and defining recommendations for action at EU and Member State level.



*This resource is a module of [EU Drug Markets: In-depth analysis](#), the fourth comprehensive overview of illicit drug markets in the European Union by the EMCDDA and [Europol](#).*

Last update: 6 May 2022

## Explore topics in this module:



[Introduction](#)



[Key findings and threat assessment](#)



[Global context](#)



[Europe as a producer](#)



[Main production methods](#)



[Criminal networks](#)



[Prices and purities](#)



[Signals of spreading use](#)



[Actions to address current threats](#)

## Introduction



Methamphetamine plays a relatively small role in European stimulant drug markets when compared with the global situation. However, at the end of 2019, an [EMCDDA-Europol joint threat assessment](#) concluded that after a period of relative stability, the threat posed by methamphetamine appeared to be increasing as the drug spread to new markets elsewhere in Europe. Despite the unprecedented disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, over the past two years, the methamphetamine situation in the European Union (EU) has continued to evolve. As well as producing methamphetamine to supply European markets, Europe is a source of the drug for external markets. In addition, Europe is a destination and transit zone for methamphetamine produced in other production hubs, such as Iran, Nigeria and, more recently, Mexico. Meanwhile, the development of methamphetamine production capacity in Afghanistan, the main source of Europe's heroin supply, poses a potential threat to the EU, given the long-established trafficking routes that exist for Afghan opioids.

In most European countries, methamphetamine is much less commonly used than amphetamine or cocaine. Historically, consumption has been concentrated in central Europe, mainly Czechia and Slovakia. However, recent years have seen increases in use in other countries and regions. In some Member States and consequently in EU-level datasets, it is not possible to distinguish between amphetamine and methamphetamine, presenting challenges for constructing an accurate picture; in these cases, the generic term 'amphetamines' is often used.

### Forms of methamphetamine on European drug markets

When using the term 'methamphetamine', we are really referring to methamphetamine hydrochloride, a crystalline solid that is soluble in water. In methamphetamine powder, finely ground crystals of methamphetamine hydrochloride are mixed with other ingredients, such as lactose, dextrose or caffeine. The powder may be ingested, snorted or less commonly dissolved and injected. Large white or translucent crystals of methamphetamine hydrochloride suitable for smoking, known as 'ice' or 'crystal meth', are also available. While the crystal form of the drug and the route of its administration is not commonly reported by surveys of users in Europe, it is important that practitioners and policymakers actively monitor this phenomenon as it can be linked to important health and social consequences.

For an historical background of methamphetamine, see the 'Historical background' section in the [EMCDDA-](#)

## Key findings and threat assessment



- **Europe's user market is relatively small but may be growing:** Europe's methamphetamine market is relatively small by global standards, but the prevalence of use and the size of the market could be underestimated since the consumption of methamphetamine powder may be reported as amphetamine in user surveys. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, experts working in harm-reduction services in some EU Member States have suggested that the use of methamphetamine may have become more popular in some user groups.
- **Increasing methamphetamine seizures:** Seizures of methamphetamine in the EU have increased significantly in the last few years, both in terms of the number of reported seizures and the amounts seized. This may be explained by an increased output of methamphetamine laboratories based in the EU and an increase in methamphetamine from production facilities located outside the EU, e.g. Iran, Mexico or Nigeria, most likely transiting Europe.
- **Mexican involvement in methamphetamine trafficking to Europe:** On several occasions, multi-tonne quantities of methamphetamine originating in Mexico have been seized in the EU. This implies a level of distribution and logistics collaboration between European and Mexican criminal networks. While these volumes appeared to be destined for export to other global markets, there is a risk that demand may be driven by increased levels of accessibility in some EU Member States. Furthermore, smaller amounts of methamphetamine are regularly intercepted in postal packages sent from Mexico, some of which may be linked to online supply.
- **Industrial-scale production in Europe:** While smaller-scale methamphetamine production continues in Czechia and neighbouring countries, methamphetamine production now occurs in industrial-scale laboratories in the Netherlands and to a lesser extent Belgium, in addition to the amphetamine and MDMA that are also produced there. The knowledge, chemicals and equipment required for the three drugs overlap considerably.
- **Dutch and Mexican collaboration and shared expertise drive large-scale methamphetamine production in Europe:** Recognising the profitability of methamphetamine in comparison to amphetamine and MDMA, European synthetic drug producers are collaborating with Mexican producers to develop production processes, while exploiting the infrastructure already in place in Europe for producing large quantities of synthetic drugs. Since 2019, the production facilities detected in the Netherlands and Belgium have increased in size, sophistication and output.
- **Challenges in controlling the availability of precursors:** The importation of precursors and auxiliary chemicals that support methamphetamine production in the EU is a critical element that is not well understood, particularly concerning the role of source countries. Criminal networks adapt to legislation and measures implemented for the control of precursors, exploiting the time lag between the identification of new precursors and their control. Further, the wide array of substances found in production facilities raise a concern that criminal networks active in the EU are involved in processing multiple drug types.
- **Crime as a service — providing essential logistics support for methamphetamine production:** Some EU-based criminal networks have specialised in and deal exclusively with logistics supply services

for synthetic drug producers. This includes delivering precursors or pre-precursors and other auxiliary chemicals, equipment and expertise in setting up production facilities. These networks are part of an ecosystem where crime is strongly connected with the legitimate business environment, facilitated by the use of corruption.

- **Health, safety and environmental risks linked to methamphetamine production:** Fatalities related to fires, explosions or suffocation from carbon monoxide or other toxic fumes caused by the production process have occurred. Production on a large scale also generates huge quantities of chemical waste that is often dumped, creating risks to human health, harming the environment and generating costs for local municipalities.

## Anticipating future threats

- **Further spread in Europe to a diverse user group:** Methamphetamine is a drug that appeals to diverse user groups, depending on the context and the form of the drug used. The way methamphetamine is used is an important determinant of harm, with injecting and smoking particularly linked to more problematic patterns of use. Injecting may involve risky practices, such as reusing or sharing syringes, and contributes to the transmission of blood-borne diseases.
- **Crystal methamphetamine — an unwelcome addition to the EU drug market:** The potential spread of the smokable crystal form of methamphetamine, due to increased amounts present in the EU, is a concern in terms of health consequences including acute toxicity, psychotic episodes, polydrug use and death. In the longer term, there is the potential for an additional burden to be placed on hospitals and specialised treatment services. In addition to the harms to individuals, there are risks to public safety including criminality, violence or dangerous behaviours such as driving while under the influence of drugs.
- **Serious violence:** The high profitability of the drug business can lead to intense competition and rivalries between criminal groups that may spill over into EU society. At present, the cooperation between Mexican and EU criminal networks appears to be focused on trade and profit. In the long term, there may be a risk of violent confrontations. As such, the emerging signs of Mexican criminal networks gaining a foothold in Europe are a warning signal, which may have long-term implications for the security environment in the EU, and increased efforts are needed to prevent further expansion.
- **Potential for production of fentanyl in the EU:** In addition to producing methamphetamine, it is known that Mexican criminal networks produce fentanyl for the US market. Therefore, there is a threat that cooperation between Mexican and European criminal networks could result in the spread of fentanyl production to the EU.
- **Expansion of organised crime, corruption and money laundering:** The growth of large-scale production of methamphetamine in Europe has the potential to create further criminal collaborations and drive more corruption along the supply chain, creating a parallel economy. Money laundering exposes institutions to business risk, and investigations can be complex and time-consuming.
- **Developments in Afghanistan:** The production of methamphetamine in Afghanistan using ephedrine from plant sources has been emerging since 2016. Although evidence of trafficking to Europe is limited, the low cost of Afghan methamphetamine may present an economic incentive to import from this source. The existing trafficking routes and infrastructure for Afghan heroin may also present an opportunity for criminal networks and a threat for the EU. Recent increases in methamphetamine use and seizures in Turkey (also of methamphetamine in liquid form) may be an early indicator of activity on the Balkan route. It will be important to be prepared, both operationally and strategically, for a supply-side push from

this direction.

## Methamphetamine in the global context



Methamphetamine is reported to be the most widely consumed synthetic stimulant drug in the world. Europe remains a relatively small market compared to Asia, North America and Australia, where more than a quarter of people in drug treatment are being treated for amphetamine-type stimulant use disorder (which includes the use of methamphetamine).

Globally, more than 70 % of all amphetamines seized in 2019 was methamphetamine (325 tonnes), with seizures doubling over the preceding five years. Almost all of the illicit synthetic drug laboratories reported to the UNODC between 2015 and 2019 were related to methamphetamine. Trends and analysis suggest there has been a shift to fewer laboratories with higher production capacity and that the manufacturing process has become increasingly complex.

The illicit manufacture of methamphetamine in east and south-east Asia is concentrated in Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, while the North American market is served by large-scale production in Mexico, or through small-scale facilities in Canada and the United States. Other manufacturing zones include Afghanistan, Iran and West Africa.

## Europe's emergence as a globally important producer



From 2010 to 2020, the quantity of methamphetamine reported seized in the EU increased by 477 %, with long-term trends pointing to market expansion. The main methamphetamine production sites in the EU are located in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Czechia and neighbouring countries.

In 2020, several large-scale methamphetamine production facilities were dismantled in Belgium and the Netherlands, and recent indications point to cooperation between Mexican and European drug producers. Mexican criminal networks have also been involved in trafficking large quantities of methamphetamine from Mexico to Europe. An important development has also been noted in Afghanistan, where methamphetamine production has been increasing. Record-breaking amounts of methamphetamine, believed to be of Afghan origin, have been seized along pre-EU parts of existing heroin trafficking routes. This development raises the threat of methamphetamine supply to the EU from this direction.

## Main production methods used in Europe



In Europe, two main methamphetamine production methods exist. One method is based on ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, mostly used in small- to mid-medium-scale laboratories in and around Czechia, and is difficult to scale up. The other method uses BMK, an oil imported to or made in Europe from chemicals known as designer precursors or pre-precursors. This method is used in industrial-scale laboratories, as observed in the Netherlands and Belgium. Recent reports suggest that BMK-based laboratories have increased their efficiency and output by reprocessing waste products to obtain greater quantities of potent methamphetamine.

In 2020, seven EU Member States seized a large amount of BMK and an even larger amount of pre-precursor chemicals, which could be used to produce significant amounts of BMK. Synthetic drug producers develop new designer precursors as controls are introduced, exposing the weaknesses of the control regime.

Synthetic drug production can be dangerous to humans, with fatalities recorded in drug production laboratories in recent years, while dumping sites cause environmental damage.

## Criminal networks in Europe — flexible, adaptable and resilient



Criminal networks active in methamphetamine production and trafficking in the EU rapidly adapt to regulatory changes aimed at curbing the methamphetamine trade. This includes circumventing legislative controls and adapting to the availability of precursors.

Large-scale production of methamphetamine in the EU is often facilitated by an international network providing access to logistical and transport infrastructure. The trade is fragmented, reliant on services of brokers that connect logistics suppliers, methamphetamine producers, transporters or distributors.

Logistic support has become a parallel criminal business, with some groups specialised in providing precursors, related chemicals and equipment necessary for synthetic drug production. Occasionally, parallel networks deliver the full package needed to set up and operate production facilities.

While the majority of methamphetamine for EU markets is seemingly supplied by European producers, large-scale trafficking of methamphetamine from Mexico to the EU, most likely in transit to non-EU markets, also takes place. Such smuggling is believed to be largely based on concealment in legitimate goods transported in maritime shipping containers.

## Prices and purities



Data on the retail price of methamphetamine in Europe are limited. For countries with recent data there is a considerable range, as prices per gram go from EUR 13.50 in Hungary to EUR 113 in Cyprus. Some of the price disparity is related to the type of methamphetamine, with powder usually being cheaper than crystal methamphetamine. Analysis of darknet data reveals that the typical price paid is EUR 55 per gram.

Wholesale price data is also limited. In Czechia, 1 kilogram of locally produced methamphetamine costs between EUR 18 900 and EUR 21 200. Meanwhile, Dutch law enforcement reports that the wholesale price of methamphetamine dropped by almost 40 %, from an average of EUR 12 750 in 2019 to EUR 7 675 per kilogram in 2020.

Interpreting methamphetamine purity data is challenging because it is not always reported whether samples are of powder or crystal methamphetamine. In countries where powder methamphetamine is the main product, the average purities are generally lower than in countries where crystal methamphetamine predominates.

## Methamphetamine use in Europe: signals of spreading use



Monitoring the methamphetamine market in the EU is complicated by the different forms of the drug available and patterns of use. While methamphetamine use in Europe is concentrated in Czechia and Slovakia, there are signals of increasing use in some countries where it has been less common. Work to assess the impact of COVID-19 has also suggested that methamphetamine use may have become more popular in some user groups.

An increase in reported methamphetamine possession or use offences was observed between 2015 and 2020. While the number of such reported cases dropped in most EU Member States in 2020, this may in part be explained due to shifting law enforcement priorities in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Estimating the size of the overall EU retail methamphetamine market is difficult, as in some countries it is not possible to separate methamphetamine from amphetamine in the relevant datasets. Due to data availability, a country-level estimate of the retail market in Czechia has been possible, where demand-based estimates point to a retail market of EUR 181 million.

## Actions to address current threats and increase preparedness



The global developments related to the production and trafficking of methamphetamine pose the threat that the substance becomes more available in Europe, bringing with it a complex set of health and security problems.

At the strategic level, four priority areas emerge.

- The rapid identification of trends in methamphetamine production, trafficking and use, in order to effectively address the associated health and social problems, including criminality.
- The reduction of methamphetamine production in the EU, its distribution in the EU and export to global markets.
- The disruption of methamphetamine flows into the EU and the transit of the drug to other markets.
- The strengthening of public health and policy responses.

To respond to the current and future threats, the following actions are required.

## Improve the intelligence picture; monitoring and detection

- **Enhance the exchange of intelligence and operational information.** This requires strengthening the exchange of information between border guards, customs, and police at Member State level to enhance joint risk analysis. This includes information on seizures, illicit laboratories and production methods, including precursors, other chemicals and equipment. At EU-level such information should also be shared through the existing platforms, such as EMPACT.
- **Increase efforts to identify, map and profile criminal networks active in methamphetamine production, trafficking and distribution.** This will improve the tactical intelligence picture, facilitate the identification of high-risk criminal networks and high-value targets and support the prioritisation of operational resources.
- **Systematically monitor methamphetamine market-related violence and corruption,** which negatively impact the security of European citizens. To improve operational and strategic responses, it is important to understand better how criminal networks use corruption and violence to facilitate methamphetamine production, trafficking and distribution in the EU.
- **Invest in innovative approaches to support operational responses.** New technologies have the potential to improve our understanding of the methamphetamine market and support more effective operational responses. Useful approaches include chemical profiling, satellite imagery and artificial intelligence.
- **Better understand methamphetamine flows** within the EU and Europe's role as a destination and transit zone for methamphetamine produced outside Europe, from countries such as Afghanistan, Nigeria, Iran and Mexico. It is also important to monitor the flow of methamphetamine produced in the EU to third countries, including conflict zones.
- **Increase forensic and toxicological capacity at both European and Member State level.** Current capacity is insufficient to provide timely and accurate analyses of the methamphetamine market in Europe. Monitoring systems need to develop the capacity to report the form of methamphetamine (powder, crystal and liquid) and the route of administration (inhalation, smoking and injection). Methamphetamine and amphetamine must be clearly distinguished in all data sets.
- **Strengthen the capacity to rapidly identify and follow up on emerging threats.** A proactive approach is needed to rapidly identify and follow up on signals of increased methamphetamine availability and use. This will require a multi-indicator approach incorporating both established statistical data e.g. seizures, price and purity, law enforcement intelligence and new, more innovative monitoring methods,



such as wastewater analysis, hospital emergencies, syringe residue analysis, drug checking and monitoring of darknet markets and other online supply channels.

## Strengthen responses to reduce supply and enhance security

- **Strengthen operational responses through priority actions against key criminal actors.** Enhance cooperation and coordinated efforts by making full use of EMPACT and other European instruments that support cooperation such as operational task forces and joint investigation teams, pooling the resources of national authorities, EU agencies and participating strategic partners.
- **Target key entry points for trafficking methamphetamine.** Focus on maritime routes from Latin America, airports with connections to known production zones and on postal parcel traffic. Specific actions should be implemented on the Balkan route, to prevent the establishment of a methamphetamine supply line to Europe. The most effective screening technologies for the detection of methamphetamine and drug precursors in containers, vehicles and ships should be deployed at key locations.
- **Target key EU locations for methamphetamine production.** Authorities in the main production hubs must be supported to tackle production and prevent displacement to other Member States. In particular, efforts must be made to prevent the transfer of specialist knowledge and expertise needed for the large-scale production of methamphetamine.
- **Disrupt criminal business models.** Financial investigations into money laundering conducted in parallel with investigations into methamphetamine production and trafficking operations provide opportunities to disrupt criminal enterprises. Particular attention needs to be paid to the criminal use of legal business structures to facilitate the trafficking of methamphetamine and to obtain the chemicals or equipment needed for production.
- **Target the supply of precursors and equipment used in methamphetamine production in the EU.** There is a need to prioritise operations that target the supply of precursors and other chemicals and equipment used to produce methamphetamine. A specific focus should be placed on the chemicals associated with large-scale production in the EU. In addition, it is important to target independent brokers and criminal networks providing specialised logistics and other services that facilitate production.
- **Strengthen public-private partnerships** to raise the awareness of methamphetamine risks, working with companies in the legitimate logistics sector, the chemicals industry and with equipment suppliers. Companies should be enabled and encouraged to report suspicious activities and to implement targeted preventive measures, such as know your customer initiatives.

## Strengthen international cooperation

- **Further enhance international cooperation between the Member States, the EU, and key international stakeholders** working to reduce the supply of methamphetamine, precursors and other essential chemicals. The cooperation should be based on active engagement combined with an intensified exchange of operational and strategic information.
- **Initiate multilateral investigations into criminal networks trafficking methamphetamine and precursors into the EU.** Closer cooperation with trusted partners in methamphetamine-producing regions is needed. Special attention and priority should be given to cooperation with the UN system, the US, Latin American countries (particularly Mexico), as well as China and India.
- **Intensify cooperation efforts with countries on heroin trafficking routes to Europe.** The strong supply reduction partnership that has been established between the EU and Turkey focused on restricting

drug flows on the Balkan route should be expanded to address methamphetamine-related threats. In addition, efforts should be made to engage countries neighbouring Afghanistan and countries on the northern and southern heroin trafficking routes.

## Investment in capacity-building

- **Increase the awareness of threats related to methamphetamine.** Raise awareness and provide training for border guards, customs and police focused on the routes and modi operandi used for trafficking methamphetamine and precursors. In particular, the risk of smuggling methamphetamine or ephedrine in liquid form should be highlighted.
- **Support the forensic analysis and chemical profiling of methamphetamine seizures.** Greater efforts are needed to harmonise the routine forensic analysis of methamphetamine seizures in Europe. The transfer of samples for chemical profiling should be facilitated by the Member States with a view to improve the intelligence picture, determine production methods and, potentially, the origin of the drug.
- **Increase capacities to safely dismantle sites related to methamphetamine production.** Training and access to specialised equipment is needed for law enforcement and other first responders in order to manage the safety risks at locations related to production, including illicit laboratories, chemical storage and waste dump sites.

## Strengthen policy, public health and safety responses

- **Increase awareness of methamphetamine threats at policy level.** Awareness raising is needed to increase the preparedness of Member States to respond to methamphetamine-related threats. Support to policy at Member State level could be provided through threat assessments, targeted rapid alerts and risk communications in order to implement multi-disciplinary national and local action plans.
- **Develop prevention, harm reduction and treatment responses.** Identify evidence-based approaches to prevention, treatment and harm reduction, tailored to the needs of those who use methamphetamine. This includes measures to reduce the risk of overdose, infectious disease and mental health disorders. Prevention and harm reduction messages and interventions need to specifically address the risks associated with injecting, and smoking the crystal form of the drug.
- **Enhance the understanding and awareness of the environmental impacts of methamphetamine production.** Develop strategies and actions to address the environmental impact such as pollution, hazards to health and economic costs associated with cleaning contaminated sites and disposal of chemical waste.

## Methodology and references

© EMCDDA, Europol, 2022

For further information on copyright and reuse, please see our [legal notice](#).

**Methodology:** Read more about the [methodology](#) used to collect data for this analysis.

**References:** Consult the [list of references](#) used in this resource.

**Abbreviations:** Consult the list of [acronyms and other abbreviations](#) used in this resource.

**Photo credits:** Introduction, Key findings and threat assessment, Global context, Criminal networks, Actions to address current threats (istockphoto.com). Europe as a producer, Main production methods (Belgian Federal Police). Prices and purities, Signals of spreading use (Netherlands Forensic Institute).

**Recommended citation:** European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and Europol (2022), *EU Drug Market: Methamphetamine — In-depth analysis*,  
<https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/eu-drug-markets/methamphetamin...>

**Identifiers:** Catalogue number: TD-01-22-355-EN-Q | ISBN: 978-92-9497-739-7 | DOI: 10.2810/67042

---

Printed from [https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/eu-drug-markets/methamphetamine\\_en](https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/eu-drug-markets/methamphetamine_en) on 13/5/2022